



Chapter Seven

Great Spiritual Masters

Narada Muni

Narada Muni is inevitably associated with the narrations of the Puranas. He is described in the Bhagavatam. In his previous life he was the son of a maidservant, but by good association with pure devotees he became enlightened in devotional service, and in the next life he became a perfect man comparable with himself only. In the Mahabharata his name is mentioned in many places. He is the principle devarsi, or the chief sage amongst the demigods. He is the son and disciple of Brahmaji, and from him the disciplic succession in the line of Brahma has been spread. He initiated Prahlada Maharaja, Dhruva Maharaja and many celebrated devotees of the Lord.

He initiated even Vyasadeva, the author of the Vedic literatures, and from Vyasadeva, Madhvacharya was initiated, and thus the Madhva-sampradaya, in which the Gaudiya-sampradaya is also included, has spread all over the universe. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu belonged to this Madhva-sampradaya; therefore, Brahmaji, Narada, Vyasa, down to Madhva, Caitanya and the Gosvamis all belonged to the same line of disciplic succession. Naradaji has instructed many kings from time immemorial. In the Bhagavatam we can see that he instructed Prahlada Maharaja while he was in the womb of his mother, and he instructed Vasudeva, father of Krsna, as well as Maharaja Yudhisthira. (Srimad Bhagavatam 1.9.7 purport)

Srila Vyasadeva

He is known as Krsna, Krsna-dvaipayana, Dvaipayana, Satyavati-suta, Parasarya, Parasaratmaja, Badarayana, Vedavyasa, etc. He was the son of Mahamuni Parasara in the womb of Satyavati prior to her betrothal with Maharaja Santanu, the father of the great general Grandfather Bhismadeva. He is a powerful incarnation of Narayana, and he broadcasts the Vedic wisdom to the world. As such, Vyasadeva is offered respects before one chants the Vedic literature, especially the Puranas. Sukadeva Gosvami was his son, and rsis like Vaisampayana were his disciples for different branches of the Vedas. He is the author of the great epic Mahabharata and the great transcendental literature Bhagavatam.

The Brahma-sutras -- the Vedanta-sutras, or Badarayana-sutras -- were compiled by him. Amongst sages he is the most respected author by dint of severe penances. When he wanted to record the great epic Mahabharata for the welfare of all people in the age of Kali, he was feeling the necessity of a powerful writer who could take up his dictation. By the order of



Brahmaji, Sri Ganesaji took up the charge of noting down the dictation on the condition that Vyasadeva would not stop dictation for a moment. The Mahabharata was thus compiled by the joint endeavor of Vyasa and Ganesa. (Srimad Bhagavatam 1.9.7 purport)

The Six Gosvamis of Vrindavana

The six Gosvamis of Vrindavana, namely Srila Rupa Gosvami, Srila Sanatana Gosvami, Srila Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami, Srila Raghunatha das Gosvami, Srila Jiva Gosvami, and Srila Gopal Bhatta Gosvami, were all intimate disciples of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. They resided in Vrindavana and were entrusted with the tasks of excavating the lost holy places of Krishna's pastimes and compiling volumes of literature on the science of Krishna consciousness. The Gosvamis were exemplars of the topmost platform of Krishna consciousness. What follow are short biographical sketches of their lives.

Sri Sanatana Gosvami

Sri Sanatana Gosvami is described in the Gaura-ganoddhadesa-dipika (181). He was formerly known as Rati-manjari or sometimes Lavanga-manjari. In the Bhakti-ratnakara it is stated that his spiritual master, Vidya-vacaspati, sometimes stayed in the village of Ramakeli, and Sanatana Gosvami studied all the Vedic literatures from him. He was so devoted to his spiritual master that this cannot be described. According to the Vedic system, if someone sees a Muslim he must perform rituals to atone for the meeting. Sanatana Gosvami always associated with Muslim kings. Not giving much attention to the Vedic injunctions, he used to visit the houses of Muslim kings, and thus he considered himself to have been converted into a Muslim. He was therefore always very humble and meek.

When Sanatana Gosvami presented himself before Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu, he said, "I am always in association with lower-class people, and my behavior is therefore very abominable." He actually belonged to a respectable brahmana family, but because he considered his behavior to be abominable, he did not try to place himself among the brahmanas but always remained among people of the lower castes. He wrote the Hari-bhakti-vilasa and Vaisnava-tosani, which is a commentary on the Tenth Canto of Srimad-Bhagavatam. In the year 1476 Sakabda (A.D. 1554) he completed the Brhad-vaisnava-tosani commentary on Srimad-Bhagavatam. In the year 1504 Sakabda (A.D. 1582) he finished the Laghu-tosani.

Cc Adi 10.84 purport

Sri Rupa Gosvami

In the Gaura-ganoddhadesa-dipika (180) Sri Rupa Gosvami is described to be the gopi named Sri Rupa-manjari. In the Bhakti-ratnakara there is a list of the books Sri Rupa Gosvami compiled.



Of all his books, the following sixteen are very popular among Vaisnavas: (1) Hamsaduta, (2) Uddhava-sandesa, (3) Krsna-janma-tithi-vidhi, (4 and 5) Radha-krsna-ganoddesa-dipika, Brhat (major) and Laghu (minor), (6) Stavamala, (7) Vidagdha-madhava, (8) Lalita-madhava, (9) Dana-keli-kaumudi, (10) Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu (this is the most celebrated book by Sri Rupa Gosvami), (11) Ujjvala-nilamani, (12) Akhyata-candrika, (13) Mathura-mahima, (14) Padyavali, (15) Nataka-candrika and (16) Laghu-bhagavatamrta. Sri Rupa Gosvami gave up all family connections, joined the renounced order of life and divided his money, giving fifty percent to the brahmanas and Vaisnavas and twenty-five percent to his kutumba (family members), and keeping twenty-five percent for personal emergencies. He met Haridasa Thakura in Jagannatha Puri, where he also met Lord Caitanya and His other associates.

Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu used to praise the handwriting of Rupa Gosvami. Srila Rupa Gosvami could compose verses according to the desires of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, and by His direction he wrote two books named Lalita-madhava and Vidagdha-madhava. Lord Caitanya desired the two brothers, Sanatana Gosvami and Rupa Gosvami, to publish many books in support of the Vaisnava religion. When Sanatana Gosvami met Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the Lord advised him also to go to Vrndavana. (Cc Adi 10.84 purport)

Sri Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami

Raghunatha Bhattacharya, or Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami, one of the six Gosvamis, was the son of Tapana Misra. Born in approximately 1425 Sakabda (A.D. 1503), he was expert in reciting Srimad-Bhagavatam, and in Antya-lila, Chapter Thirteen, it is stated that he was also expert in cooking; whatever he cooked would be nectarean. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu was greatly pleased to accept the food that he cooked, and Raghunatha Bhatta used to take the remnants of food left by Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. Raghunatha Bhattacharya lived for eight months in Jagannatha Puri, after which Lord Caitanya ordered him to go to Vrndavana to join Sri Rupa Gosvami. Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu asked Raghunatha Bhattacharya not to marry but to remain a brahmachari, and He also ordered him to read Srimad-Bhagavatam constantly. Thus he went to Vrndavana, where he engaged in reciting Srimad-Bhagavatam to Srila Rupa Gosvami. He was so expert in reciting Srimad-Bhagavatam that he would recite each and every verse in three melodious tunes.

While Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami was living with Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu, the Lord blessed him by offering him betel nuts offered to the Jagannatha Deity and a garland of tulasi said to be as long as fourteen cubits. Under Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami's order, one of his disciples constructed the Govinda temple. Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami supplied all the ornaments of the Govinda Deity. He never talked of nonsense or worldly matters but always engaged in hearing about Krsna twenty-four hours a day. He never cared to hear blasphemy of a Vaisnava. Even when there were points to be criticized, he used to say that since all the Vaisnavas were engaged in the service of the Lord, he did not mind their faults. Later Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami lived by Radha-kunda in a small cottage. In the Gaura-ganoddesa-dipika (185) it is



said that Raghunatha Bhatta Gosvami was formerly the gopi named Raga-manjari.

(Cc Adi 10.155 purport)

Sri Raghunatha das Gosvami

Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami was most probably born in the year 1416 Sakabda (A.D. 1494) in a kayastha family as the son of Govardhana Majumadara, who was the younger brother of the then zamindar, Hiranya Majumadara. The village where he took birth is known as Sri-krsnapura. On the railway line between Calcutta and Burdwan is a station named Trisabagha [now known as Adi-saptagrama], and about one and a half miles away is the village of Sri-krsnapura, where the parental home of Sri Raghunatha dasa Gosvami was situated. A temple of Sri Sri Radha-Govinda is still there. In front of the temple is a large open area but no large hall for devotees to assemble.

A rich Calcutta gentleman named Haricarana Ghosa, who resided in the Simla quarter, recently repaired the temple. The entire temple compound is surrounded by walls, and in a small room just to the side of the temple is a small platform on which Raghunatha dasa Gosvami used to worship the Deity. By the side of the temple is the dying river Sarasvati." The forefathers of Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami were all Vaisnavas and were very rich men. His spiritual master at home was Yadunandana Acarya. Although Raghunatha dasa was a family man, he had no attachment for his estate and wife. Seeing his tendency to leave home, his father and uncle engaged special bodyguards to watch over him, but nevertheless he managed to escape their vigilance and went away to Jagannatha Puri to meet Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. This incident took place in the year 1439 Sakabda (A.D. 1517).

Raghunatha dasa Gosvami compiled three books, named Stava-mala (or Stavavali), Dana-carita and Mukta-carita. He lived a long time, residing for most of his life at Radha-kunda. The place where Raghunatha dasa Gosvami performed his devotional service still exists by Radha-kunda. He almost completely gave up eating, and therefore he was very skinny and of weak health. His only concern was to chant the holy name of the Lord. He gradually reduced his sleeping until he was almost not sleeping at all. It is said that his eyes were always full of tears. When Srinivasa Acarya went to see Raghunatha dasa Gosvami, the Gosvami blessed him by embracing him. Srinivasa Acarya requested his blessings for preaching in Bengal, and Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami granted them. In the Gaura-ganoddheda-dipika (186) it is stated that Srila Raghunatha dasa Gosvami was formerly the gopi named Rasa-manjari. Sometimes it is said that he was Rati-manjari. (Cc Adi 10.91 purport)

Sri Jiva Gosvami

In the Gaura-ganoddheda-dipika (195) it is said that Srila Jiva Gosvami was formerly Vilasa-manjari gopi. From his very childhood Jiva Gosvami was greatly fond of Srimad-Bhagavatam.



He later came to Navadvipa to study Sanskrit, and, following in the footsteps of Sri Nityananda Prabhu, he circumambulated the entire Navadvipa-dhama. After visiting Navadvipa-dhama he went to Benares to study Sanskrit under Madhusudana Vacaspati, and after finishing his studies in Benares he went to Vrndavana and took shelter of his uncles, Sri Rupa and Sanatana. This is described in the Bhakti-ratnakara.

As far as our information goes, Srila Jiva Gosvami composed and edited at least twenty-five books. They are all very much celebrated, and they are listed as follows: (1) Hari-namamrta-vyakarana, (2) Sutra-malika, (3) Dhatu-sangraha, (4) Krsnarcadipika, (5) Gopala-virudavali, (6) Rasamrta-sesa, (7) Sri Madhava-mahotsava, (8) Sri Sankalpa-kalpavrksha, (9) Bhavartha-sucaka-campu, (10) Gopala-tapani-tika, (11) a commentary on the Brahma-samhita, (12) a commentary on the Bhakti-rasamrta-sindhu, (13) a commentary on the Ujjvala-nilamani, (14) a commentary on the Yogasara-stava, (15) a commentary on the Gayatri-mantra, as described in the Agni Purana, (16) a description of the Lord's lotus feet derived from the Padma Purana, (17) a description of the lotus feet of Srimati Radharani, (18) Gopala-campu (in two parts) and (19–25) seven sandarbhas: the Krama-, Tattva-, Bhagavat-, Paramatma-, Krsna-, Bhakti- and Priti-sandarbha.

After the disappearance of Srila Rupa Gosvami and Sanatana Gosvami in Vrndavana, Srila Jiva Gosvami became the acarya of all the Vaisnavas in Bengal, Orissa and the rest of the world, and it is he who used to guide them in their devotional service. In Vrndavana he established the Radha-Damodara temple, where, after retirement, we had the opportunity to live from 1962 until 1965, when we decided to come to the United States of America. When Jiva Gosvami was still present, Srila Krsnadasa Kaviraja Gosvami compiled his famous Caitanya-caritamrta. Later, Srila Jiva Gosvami inspired Srinivasa Acarya, Narottama dasa Thakura and Duhkhi Krsnadasa to preach Krsna consciousness in Bengal.

Jiva Gosvami was informed that all the manuscripts that had been collected from Vrndavana and sent to Bengal for preaching purposes were plundered near Visnupura, in Bengal, but later he received the information that the books had been recovered. Sri Jiva Gosvami awarded the designation Kaviraja to Ramacandra Sena, a disciple of Srinivasa Acarya's, and to Ramacandra's younger brother Govinda. While Jiva Gosvami was alive, Srimati Jahnavi-devi, the pleasure potency of Sri Nityananda Prabhu, went to Vrndavana with a few devotees. Jiva Gosvami was very kind to the Gaudiya Vaisnavas, the Vaisnavas from Bengal. Whoever went to Vrndavana he provided with a residence and prasadam. (Cc Adi 10.85 purport)

Sri Gopal Bhatta Gosvami

Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami was the son of Venkata Bhatta, a resident of Sri Rangam. Gopala Bhatta formerly belonged to the disciplic succession of the Ramanuja-sampradaya but later became part of the Gaudiya-sampradaya. In the year 1433 Sakabda (A.D. 1511), when Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu was touring South India, He stayed for four months during the period of



Caturmasya at the house of Venkata Bhatta, who then got the opportunity to serve the Lord to his heart's content. Gopala Bhatta also got the opportunity to serve the Lord at this time.

Sri Gopala Bhatta Gosvami was later initiated by his uncle, the great sannyasi Prabodhananda Sarasvati. Both the father and the mother of Gopala Bhatta Gosvami were extremely fortunate, for they dedicated their entire lives to the service of Lord Caitanya Mahaprabhu. They allowed Gopala Bhatta Gosvami to go to Vrndavana, and they gave up their lives thinking of Sri Caitanya Mahaprabhu. When Lord Caitanya was later informed that Gopala Bhatta Gosvami had gone to Vrndavana and met Sri Rupa and Sanatana Gosvami, He was very pleased, and He advised Sri Rupa and Sanatana to accept Gopala Bhatta Gosvami as their younger brother and take care of him. Sri Sanatana Gosvami, out of his great affection for Gopala Bhatta Gosvami, compiled the Vaisnava smṛti named Hari-bhakti-vilasa and published it under his name.

Under the instruction of Srila Rupa and Sanatana, Gopala Bhatta Gosvami installed one of the seven principal Deities of Vrndavana, the Radharamana Deity. The sevāits (priests) of the Radharamana temple belong to the Gaudiya-sampradaya. When Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvami took permission from all the Vaisnavas before writing Sri Caitanya-caritamṛta, Gopala Bhatta Gosvami also gave him his blessings, but he requested him not to mention his name in the book. Therefore Kṛṣṇadāsa Kavirāja Gosvami has mentioned Gopala Bhatta Gosvami only very cautiously in one or two passages of the Caitanya-caritamṛta. Srila Jiva Gosvami has written in the beginning of his Tattva-sandarbhā, "A devotee from southern India who was born of a brahmana family and was a very intimate friend of Rupa Gosvami and Sanatana Gosvami has written a book that he has not compiled chronologically.

Therefore I, a tiny living entity known as jiva, am trying to assort the events of the book chronologically, consulting the direction of great personalities like Madhvacārya, Sridhara Svami, Ramanujācārya and other senior Vaisnavas in the disciplic succession." In the beginning of the Bhagavat-sandarbhā there are similar statements by Srila Jiva Gosvami. Srila Gopala Bhatta Gosvami compiled a book called Sat-kriya-sara-dīpikā, edited the Hari-bhakti-vilasa, wrote a foreword to the Sat-sandarbhā and a commentary on the Kṛṣṇa-kārmṛta, and installed the Radharamana Deity in Vrndavana. In the Gaura-ganoddēsa-dīpikā (184) it is mentioned that his previous name in the pastimes of Lord Kṛṣṇa was Ananga-manjari. Sometimes he is also said to have been an incarnation of Guna-manjari. Srinivasa Acārya and Gopinātha Pujari were two of his disciples. (Cc Adi 10.105 purport)

Srila Bhaktivinoda Thakura

Thakura Bhaktivinoda led a life of incessant labor and activity for Sri Kṛṣṇa, the Supreme Personality of Godhead. He effected such immense good in the world that his work is only to be compared with the unbounded works of Sri Caitanya Himself and the Gosvamis. It was the spiritual attempts and divine writings of this individual that turned the scale and led the intelligent and educated community to believe in the noble precepts and teachings of Lord



Caitanya. Although born in opulent circumstances (on September 2, 1838), Thakura Bhaktivinoda, who was given the name Kedaranatha Datta, had to meet many difficulties in his early life.

His childhood was spent at his maternal grandfather's house at Birnagar (Ulagram), from where he came to Calcutta at the age of thirteen, after the death of his father. After he completed his education, he was requested to be present at the time of his paternal grandfather's death. His grandfather, Rajavallabha Datta, had been a famous personality of Calcutta and had retired to a lonely place in Orissa to spend his last days as an ascetic. He could predict the future and knew when he would die, since he could commune with supernatural beings. Thakura Bhaktivinoda was present at the eventful time when that great soul passed away, and after receiving his grandfather's instructions, he visited all of the major temples and asramas of the state of Orissa.

Bhaktivinoda Thakura then entered the educational service and introduced English education into the state of Orissa for the first time. He later took to the government service and was transferred to Bengal. In one town he gave a historic speech on the Srimad-Bhagavatam which attracted the attention of thousands. He made the world know what hidden treasures pervade every page of the Bhagavatam, which should be read by all persons having a philosophical turn of mind. He was transferred some years later to a town called Champaran. In this town there was a brahma-daitya living in a great banyan tree, and he was being worshiped by many degraded people. (A brahma-daitya is a type of ghost.) One day the father of a famous girl scholar came to Bhaktivinoda for alms, and Bhaktivinoda Thakura at once employed him in reading the Bhagavatam under the shade of the banyan tree which was the abode of the ghost. After one month, the Bhagavatam was completed, and then and there the tree crashed to the ground, and the ghost was gone for good. Everyone was thankful for this act except the few dishonest persons who were worshiping the ghost. Bhaktivinoda's next move was to Puri.

The government commissioner was much pleased to get him in his division, and he asked him to watch the affairs of the temple of Jagannatha on behalf of the government. During his stay at Jagannatha Puri, Thakura Bhaktivinoda devoted much of his time to the discussion of spiritual works and prepared notes on the Vedanta-sutras which were published with the commentaries of Baladeva Vidyabhusana. In 1877 he left Puri on government service, and in 1881 he started a well-known spiritual journal called the Sajjana-tosani ("The Satisfaction of Pure Devotees"). He also published the Sri Krsna-samhita, which revealed to the world the underlying philosophy explaining the spiritual existence of Krsna.

This book opened the eyes of educated people to teach them their true relationship with God. It also attracted the admiration of many German scholars, for although the public regarded Krsna as a poetic creation of erotic nature, Srila Bhaktivinoda revealed Krsna as Parabrahman, the Supreme Transcendental Person, the Absolute Being, on the basis of Vedic evidence. Bhaktivinoda Thakura was so anxious to see the land of Lord Caitanya that he applied many times for a transfer to any town nearby. Upon not receiving the desired transfer, he formally submitted a resignation from public service, but it was refused. Then, to his great rejoicing, he



obtained a transfer to Krishnanagar, twenty-five miles from Navadvipa, Mayapur. Once stationed at a place near Navadvipa, he did not let a single free moment pass without visiting the land of Navadvipa. He at once made inquiries about the exact whereabouts of the different places of Lord Caitanya' s pastimes.

Local inquiry and corroborative evidence from ancient maps of the latter part of the eighteenth century which showed the name "Sri Mayapur" at last helped him to discover the real site of the birthplace. The year 1894 was the most eventful year in the history of the Vaisnava world, and Bhaktivinoda Thakura was the prime mover of the events. It was in this year that he officially memorialized the birthsite of Sri Caitanya and brought its true identity and importance before the public eye. Thousands of visitors were present at a function held at the spot. Just after retiring from government service, Thakura Bhaktivinoda himself, in a spirit of perfect humility and with a view to giving a firm standing to the discovery, went from door to door to raise funds for a temple. The work of preaching the holy name was also in full swing, and it spread fast into the distant corners of the globe. The Gauranga-smarana-mangala-stotra, with a preface in English containing the life and precepts of Sri Caitanya, came out from Bhaktivinoda' s pen soon after the discovery of Lord Caitanya' s birthplace and found its place in all the learned institutions of both hemispheres.

The more the names of Lord Caitanya and Lord Krsna were preached, the merrier was Thakura Bhaktivinoda. He thereafter made annotations of Sri Brahma-samhita and Sri Krsna-karnamrta and gave to the world his immortal and precious works Sri Harinama-cintamani and Bhajana-rahasya. He also edited, with commentary, Srimad-bhagavatarka-marici-mala, which contains all the most prominent slokas of the Srimad-Bhagavatam pertaining to the Vaisnava philosophy. His pen never tired, and it produced many other Vaisnava philosophical works. He would begin his writings very late at night, after completing his government work, and stay up until one or two o' clock in the morning composing songs and literatures.

It was at the beginning of the twentieth century that he chose to live at Puri and build a house on the beachfront there. Many honest souls sought his blessings and readily obtained them when he accepted the renounced order of life by taking babaji initiation from Srila Gaurakisora dasa Babaji in 1908. Though he was leading the life of a renounced soul, he could not avoid the men of all description who constantly visited him. All of them received oceans of spiritual training, instructions, and blessings. In 1910 he shut himself up and remained in a perfect state of samadhi, or full concentration on the eternal pastimes of the Lord. In 1914 he passed on to the blissful realm of Goloka on the day which is observed as the disappearance day of Sri Gadadhara.

Srila Gaurakisora das Babaji

(From articles by Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati)

Appeared at the beginning of the 16th century (Bengali era), was a householder for 29 years



until his wife died and then he took Babaji initiation from Srila Bhagavata dasa Babaji (the disciple of Srila Jagannatha dasa Babaji). Gaurakisora next went to Vrindavana, travelling from village to village for about 30 years. Honored by the title 'bhajananandi', he never, even secretly, endeavored for as much as a drop of material sense gratification. In 1897 Srila Gaurakisora came to Sri Navadvipa dhama (when the Yoga-Pitha in Sri Mayapur dhama was revealed) and from then until his disappearance he lived in this area, realizing the non difference from Vrindavana. He lived by begging, cooking in discarded pots found by the roadside or along the bank of the Ganges, eating out of a human skull, and clothing himself with the washed, discarded cloth used to cover the corpses in the burning ghat. His only possessions were his tulsi neck and chanting beads, and sometimes having no beads he would chant japa on a torn, knotted cloth.

On Ekadasi he would always fast without water (nirjala). No one could ever find the opportunity to serve him, not even Bhaktivinoda, his intimate friend or Srila Bhaktisiddhanta, his only disciple. He possessed the highest love in separation for Lord Sri Krishna. He was also able to perceive the exact intentions and psychological nature of everyone around him, especially pretenders, and when he was visited by such people he would give them devastatingly pertinent advice. Sometimes he would act as though insane and blind, and sometimes he did not know whether he was dressed or not.

Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Maharaj

While working to reform Gaudiya Vaisnavism in India, he prayed to Lord Caitanya, "Your teachings have been much depreciated. It is not in my power to restore them." And he prayed for a son to help him in his preaching. When, on February 6, 1874, Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati was born to Bhaktivinoda Thakura in Jagannatha Puri, the Vaisnavas considered him the answer to his father's prayers. He was born with the umbilical cord wrapped around his neck and draped across his chest like the sacred thread worn by brahmanas. His parents gave him the name Bimala Prasada.

When Bimala Prasada was six months old, the carts of the Jagannatha festival stopped at the gate of Bhaktivinoda's residence and for three days could not be moved. Bhaktivinoda Thakura's wife brought the infant onto the cart and approached the Deity of Lord Jagannatha. Spontaneously, the infant extended his arms and touched the feet of Lord Jagannatha and was immediately blessed with a garland that fell from the body of the Lord. When Bhaktivinoda Thakura learned that the Lord's garland had fallen onto his son, he realized that this was the son for whom he had prayed. One day, when Bimala Prasada was still a child of no more than four years, his father mildly rebuked him for eating a mango not yet duly offered to Lord Krsna.

Bimala Prasada, although only a child, considered himself an offender to the Lord and vowed never to eat mangoes again. (This was a vow that he would follow throughout his life.) By the time Bimala Prasada was seven years old, he had memorized the entire Bhagavad-gita and



could even explain its verses. His father then began training him in proofreading and printing, in conjunction with the publishing of the Vaisnava magazine Sajjana-tosani. With his father, he visited many holy places and heard discourses from the learned panditas. As a student, Bimala Prasada preferred to read the books written by his father instead of the school texts. By the time he was twenty-five he had become well versed in Sanskrit, mathematics, and astronomy, and he had established himself as the author and publisher of many magazine articles and one book, *Surya-siddhanta*, for which he received the epithet *Siddhanta Sarasvati* in recognition of his erudition. When he was twenty-six his father guided him to take initiation from a renounced Vaisnava saint, *Gaurakisora dasa Babaji*, who advised him "to preach the Absolute Truth and keep aside all other works."

Receiving the blessings of *Gaurakisora dasa Babaji*, *Bimala Prasada* (now *Siddhanta Sarasvati*) resolved to dedicate his body, mind, and words to the service of Lord Kṛṣṇa. In 1905 *Siddhanta Sarasvati* took a vow to chant the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra a billion times. Residing in Mayapur in a grass hut near the birthplace of Lord Caitanya, he chanted the Hare Kṛṣṇa mantra day and night. He cooked rice once a day in an earthen pot and ate nothing more; he slept on the ground, and when the rainwater leaked through the grass ceiling, he sat beneath an umbrella, chanting. In 1911, while his aging father was lying ill, *Siddhanta Sarasvati* took up a challenge against pseudo Vaisnavas who claimed that birth in their caste was the prerequisite for preaching Kṛṣṇa consciousness. The caste-conscious brahmana community had become incensed by *Bhaktivinoda Thakura*'s presentation of many scriptural proofs that anyone, regardless of birth, could become a brahmana Vaisnava. These smarta brahmanas, out to prove the inferiority of the Vaisnavas, arranged a discussion. On behalf of his indisposed father, young *Siddhanta Sarasvati* wrote an essay, "The Conclusive Difference Between the Brahmana and the Vaisnava," and submitted it before his father.

Despite his poor health, *Bhaktivinoda Thakura* was elated to hear the arguments that would soundly defeat the challenge of the smartas. *Siddhanta Sarasvati* then traveled to Midnapore, where panditas from all over India had gathered for a three-day discussion. Some of the smarta panditas who spoke first claimed that anyone born in a sudra family, even though initiated by a spiritual master, could never become purified and perform the brahminical duties of worshiping the Deity or initiating disciples. Finally, *Siddhanta Sarasvati* delivered his speech. He began quoting Vedic references glorifying the brahmanas, and at this the smarta scholars became very much pleased. But when he began discussing the actual qualifications for becoming a brahmana, the qualities of the Vaisnavas, the relationship between the two, and who, according to the Vedic literature, is qualified to become a spiritual master and initiate disciples, then the joy of the Vaisnava-haters disappeared. *Siddhanta Sarasvati* conclusively proved from the scriptures that if one is born as a sudra but exhibits the qualities of a brahmana, then he should be honored as a brahmana, despite his birth. And if one is born in a brahmana family but acts like a sudra, then he is not a brahmana. After his speech, *Siddhanta Sarasvati* was congratulated by the president of the conference, and thousands thronged around him. It was a victory for Vaisnavism.



With the passing away of his father in 1914 and his spiritual master in 1915, Siddhanta Sarasvati continued the mission of Lord Caitanya. He assumed editorship of Sajjana-tosani and established the Bhagwat Press in Krishnanagar. Then in 1918, in Mayapur, he sat down before a picture of Gaurakisora dasa Babaji and initiated himself into the sannyasa order. At this time he assumed the sannyasa title Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Gosvami Maharaja. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati was dedicated to using the printing press as the best medium for large-scale distribution of Krsna consciousness. He thought of the printing press as a brhat mrdanga, a big mrdanga. Although the mrdanga drum had traditionally been used to accompany kirtana, even during the time of Lord Caitanya, and although Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati himself led kirtana parties and sent groups of devotees chanting in the streets and playing on the mrdangas, such kirtanas could be heard only for a block or two. But with the brhat mrdanga, the big mrdanga drum of the printing press, the message of Lord Caitanya could be spread all over the world.

His Divine Grace A.C.Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada

His Divine Grace A. C. Bhaktivedanta Swami Prabhupada appeared in this world in 1896 in Calcutta, India. He first met his spiritual master, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Gosvami, in 1922. Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati, a prominent religious scholar and the founder of sixty-four Gaudiya Mathas (Vedic institutes), liked this educated young man and convinced him to dedicate his life to teaching Vedic knowledge. Srila Prabhupada became his student and, eleven years later (1933), in Allahabad, became his initiated disciple. At their first meeting, in 1922, Srila Bhaktisiddhanta Sarasvati Thakura requested Srila Prabhupada to broadcast Vedic knowledge through the English language. In the years that followed, Srila Prabhupada wrote a commentary on the Bhagavad-gita, assisted the Gaudiya Matha in its work and, in 1944, started Back to Godhead magazine.

Maintaining the publication was a struggle. Single-handedly, Srila Prabhupada wrote the material, edited it, typed the manuscripts, checked the galley proofs, and even distributed the individual copies. The magazine is now being continued by his followers and is published in over thirty languages. Recognizing Srila Prabhupada's philosophical learning and devotion, the society of Gaudiya Vaisnavas honored him in 1947 with the title "Bhaktivedanta." In 1950, at the age of fifty-four, Srila Prabhupada retired from family life, adopting the vanaprastha (retired) order to devote more time to study, writing and preaching. Srila Prabhupada moved to the holy city of Vrndavana, where he lived in humble circumstances in the historic medieval temple of Radha-Damodara. There he spent several years in deep study and writing. He accepted the renounced order of life (sannyasa) in 1959. At Radha-Damodara, Srila Prabhupada began work on his life's masterpiece: a multivolume annotated translation of the eighteen thousand-verse Srimad-Bhagavatam (Bhagavata Purana).

He also wrote Easy Journey to Other Planets. After publishing three volumes of the Bhagavatam, Srila Prabhupada journeyed to the United States, arriving in September of 1965 to fulfill the mission of his spiritual master. With him he brought no foreign exchange, but he did



bring sets of his books. After almost a year of difficulty he established the International Society for Krishna Consciousness, in July of 1966. Subsequently, His Divine Grace went on to write more than sixty volumes of authoritative, annotated translations and summary studies of the philosophical and religious classics of India. Before passing away on November 14, 1977, Srila Prabhupada guided his Society to a worldwide confederation of more than one hundred asramas, schools, temples, institutes and farm communities.

In 1968 Srila Prabhupada created New Vrindaban, an experimental Vedic community in the hills of West Virginia, which became a thriving rural community of more than two thousand acres. Several similar communities were established in the United States and in other countries. In 1972 His Divine Grace introduced the Vedic system of primary and secondary education in the West by founding the Gurukula school in Dallas, Texas. Since then, his disciples have established schools throughout the United States and the rest of the world, with the principal educational centers located in Vrindavana and Mayapur, India. On the level of higher education, Srila Prabhupada formed the Bhaktivedanta Institute, a center for advanced study and research into the nature of consciousness and the self. The Institute is comprised of a body of scientists and scholars who have recognized the unique value of the teachings brought to the West by His Divine Grace.

Srila Prabhupada also oversaw the construction of several large international cultural centers in India. The center at Sridhama Mayapur in West Bengal is the site for a future spiritual city. In Vrindavana are the magnificent Krsna-Balarama Temple and International Guesthouse and the Srila Prabhupada Memorial and Museum. There is also a major cultural and educational center in Bombay. Srila Prabhupada's most significant contributions, however, are his books. Highly respected by the academic community for their authority, depth and clarity, they are used as standard textbooks in numerous college courses. His writings have been translated into over fifty languages. The Bhaktivedanta Book Trust, established in 1972 to present the works of His Divine Grace, has become the world's largest publisher of books in the field of Indian religion and philosophy.

In just twelve years, in spite of his advanced age, Srila Prabhupada circled the globe fourteen times on lecture tours that took him to six continents, where he daily enlightened audiences with classes and discussions on the Vedic literature. Over two thousand of these lectures are available on recordings. Initiating over ten thousand disciples and enlisting further tens of thousands of Life Member supporters, he guided his followers and enquirers with valuable instructions and counselling both personally and through some seven thousand letters. In spite of such a vigorous regimen, Srila Prabhupada continued to write prolifically. His works constitute a veritable library of Vedic philosophy, religion, literature and culture.